

Side

Brown

The **Monterey International Pop Festival** that it turns out after 25 years was a one of kind event is the subject of a lavish four CD box on Rhino. 1967 was a landmark year in rock 'n' roll that saw the introduction of not only several new bands but sounds. The various styles of rock and pop came together that year like never before, played both on the (then-new) FM Rock and AM Top 40 radio stations. Monterey reflected that divergence and introduced new artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin to a large audience for the first time.

Two of the best performances -- those by Jimi Hendrix and Otis Redding -- were previously available on a Warner Brothers album. The box, however offers an expanded version of Hendrix's set including five songs not on the earlier album, Howling Wolf's "Killing Floor," Foxey Lady," "Hey Joe," "The Wind Cries Mary" and "Purple Haze." The first two songs are somewhat sloppy, making it easy to see why they weren't included earlier. Considering this was the Jimi Hendrix Experience's U.S. debut, it was a historic event. No one had ever heard guitar played that way before. Hendrix's between song comments are an intriguing combination of nervousness and the flower power vibe that apparently dominated the show.

Redding's performance -- his first show before a rock (as opposed to R and B) crowd -- was equally legendary. He pulled out all the stops propelled to unbelievable heights by the pumped up and sizzling hot Booker T. and the MGs. In sheer momentum, these five songs easily surpass his other live albums.

Not quite at Redding's level in terms of generating excitement, but smoothly professional is Lou Rawls a major star at the time. His three songs make most

(more)

2 Side

Brown of the

other performers seem amateurs by comparison.

Another highlight is Big Brother and the Holding Company. This was the performance that catapulted Joplin to stardom. The standout is "Ball and Chain," a Joplin tour de force. Joplin was soon to discard the rest of Big Brother, but they come off a hell of a lot better than some of the groups on the set who were much bigger names at the time.

The Jefferson Airplane song are marked by better sound fidelity than much of the set. The band is rehearsed and confident. Grace Slick tends to overpower the other two singers Marty Balin and Paul Kantner, but it's still a winning performance. Jack Casady contributes some incredible bass playing.

One of the strongest segments is the five songs by the Butterfield Blues Band. This was the second version of the group after the departure of guitarist Mike Bloomfield with Elvin Bishop taking over lead chores. Butterfield had recently added a horn section (including Dave Sanborn on sax) and his set here is an early look at the sound that would mark his next two albums, *The Resurrection of Pigboy Crabshaw* and *In My Own Dream*. Particularly interesting is the rearranged "Look Over Yonder's Wall," "Double Trouble" where Bishop truly wails and Ray Charles' "Mary Ann" where they swing wildly.

Monterey also served as the debut for Mike Bloomfield's Electric Flag, a group that crumbled before it could reach its potential. Their two songs "Groovin' Is Easy" and "Wine" show they were one of the tighter bands at the

festival, revealing a power their one studio album only hinted at.

Also playing the blues were Canned Heat. More down-home and basic than Butterfield and Bloomfield, their short set, while not setting off sparks is one of

(more)

3 Side

Brown

the most consistent and proficient.

Other performances aren't quite so stellar. The Mamas & The Papas (in what turned out to be their last performance together) played without rehearsal since group leader John Phillips organized the festival, putting his own band second in priority. Denny Doherty (the other "Papa") didn't even show until minutes before they took the stage. Their initial two songs are downright awful. Cass Elliot manages to shine above her band mates and pulls them out of it for "California Dreamin'."

The Byrds' set serves to show just how obnoxious David Crosby really is. This was one of his last appearances with the band and his between song comments are the epitome of self righteousness. Never a great group in person, their playing is incredibly sloppy. Still this is one of the few examples of what they were like in person.

Disappointingly sloppy is the the Who. Their set that included a classic Pete Townshend guitar destroying sequence may have been fun to watch (it's one of the highlights of the documentary film of the festival) but on disc, their six songs are marred by poor sound, bad recording quality (technology then was not what it is now) and an amazing inability to sing in pitch. What does come through is that they were creatively ambitious, especially on the mini-opera, "A Quick One While He's Away."

The set is by no means complete -- a live Buffalo Springfield performance (even though Neil Young had just left the band) might have been something special, but according to the notes they along with Simon and Garfunkel, Johnny Rivers, Laura Nyro, Quicksilver, Moby Grape and (the forgotten) Paupers

(more)

4 Side

Brown

evidently declined to participate in this retrospective.

The remaining musicians who contribute one or two songs range from pretty good (Country Joe and the Fish and the Association) to laughable (Eric Burdon), to excessive (The Blues Project) and well... Ravi Shankar is Ravi Shankar.

Included is a lavish book that goes to great lengths to convey the atmosphere of the festival and also includes comments from various performers. One of the best is Steve Cropper on Pete Townshend's guitar destroying antics: "Why throw away a good instrument? Somebody down the line somewhere coulda used that."

One thing not mentioned in the book is that within 20 years at least nine of the musicians who participated (and one who visibly attended Brian Jones) would be dead, mostly victims of substance abuse. Otis Redding, killed in a plane crash six months after the festival didn't live long enough to capitalize on his success.

Ultimately (with a couple of exceptions), *Monterey* is important as a

historical document. In terms of listening pleasure the rewards are scattered. It probably would be more impressive had it been edited to two or three discs instead of four.